

December 2011 Newsletter
Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai

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December Training Event, Franklin, Kentucky

by Ken Maunz

We have picked a date and training times for our visit to Mr. Herrmann's club in Franklin Ky. It will be Fri. Dec. 2, 6pm to 9pm and Sat. Dec. 3, 9am to 4pm. Anyone interested may contact Mr. Herrmann, his info is on the GKK website under dojo directory.

An Excerpt from:

Goju-Ryu Karate-Do

Volume 1, Fundamentals for Traditional Practitioners

by Motoo Yamakura

Motoo Yamakura was born in Kyoto, Japan in 1943. His father was an educator and an officer in the Japanese Imperial Army and led the English Battalion in World War I. After the war, the elder Yamakura spent most of his time teaching math and Japanese writings. In addition, he was an expert in kendo.

Motoo Yamakura was wild and violent in his youth. He was the type of child who was always getting into trouble. At the age of eight, he was renowned in his neighborhood as the best fighter in his age group. He was often involved in fights with older boys and was beaten up many times.

At this time he started his formal karate training. He studied in the Temple of Kyoto where many karate schools were to be found. The basic moves of karate were taught there, but students also spent much of their time practicing kobudo (weapons) in the temple's yard. Classes were held only at night. Running through the nearby mountains was one of the major forms of training. His involvement in neighborhood fights continued, and Yamakura was not completely satisfied with the teaching in the temple because it taught more theories and discipline than fighting skills.

Located a few miles from where Yamakura lived was one of the branches of Seigo Tada's organization, the Tojukuji Dojo, which was known to be a tough school. Mr. Sakata, then a yondan, was the dojo instructor. Yamakura had visited there previously but had decided not to attend because the students looked too tough and there were no children in the dojo. This time, however, he was older and more desperate, and he thought the training available in the Tojukuji Dojo would make him tougher. In this dojo, at the age of fourteen, Yamakura was much too young and too small to be king of the hill. He now lost more fights than he won. He was anything but a star in this new dojo. There were no junior divisions, even though junior rankings were accepted as token signs of progress. The only real distinctions of rank were either black belt or white belt, though there were also a few brown belts. Full contact was permitted in the matches. Yamakura would never forget those gloomy days in the dojo training. A bloody nose was a daily routine, and a broken tooth was not uncommon. Only the toughest survived the rigorous training. The training fee was so nominal that



Boston's Motoo Yamakura, a Goju stylist, delivers punch to Chuck Norris in match to determine light-heavyweight title.

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financial burden was not a factor in entering or quitting. Training started with beginners mopping the hardwood floor, a task that Yamakura spent many more hours on than did his peers. Next on the schedule was kihon led by instructors who were appointed daily by the dojo instructor (Shi Han Dai).

Kihon was the longest part of the training. All of the students spent half of their time practicing kihon, including body shifting exercise. Pre-arranged sparring was then taught and practiced. Katas were practiced and evaluated but were never given much time during the training period.

A more regimented training would come to Yamakura's karate life when he was to enter his college karate club. But for the present, body strengthening exercises were optional. Yamakura spent many hours of kata training before the start of class. Running, makiwara and nigiri-game were also optional and could stretch a normal two-hour session into four or more hours.

Everyone wanted to learn, yet no one wanted to suffer, but there was no way around the suffering. Senior instructors started beginners with nice and easy training, but as the students began to progress, the delivery of a "lesson" became a very common occurrence. A "lesson" taught a student not to be overconfident. Training became like an obstacle course. Yamakura would overcome one obstacle and become comfortable with the training, and then another obstacle would be thrown at him.

In the beginning instructors threw punches and kicks slowly so the beginners could block. But later, more than once, those attacks became more forceful. Instructors' punches landing in faces and kicks driving into stomachs became a common scene in the dojo. The sounds of groaning and moaning were often heard. Needless to say, Yamakura's early stage of karate training was not a glorious one.

Yamakura remembers the famous training method which strengthened him tremendously. "I was hit on the nose and the blood was all over my face. I was on the floor in the corner of the dojo. I was given a cold towel to put on my face while the instructor tapped on the back of my neck to stop the bleeding. A few minutes later, when the flow of blood had stopped, I was back on the floor facing the same person who had just hit me. He told me 'Yamakura, it is dishonor to be hit on the same spot by the same person - cover your nose.' I put both hands in front of my face. He threw a hard punch which hit my hands and drove them into my face which resulted in my landing on the floor again".

The instructor then said, "Remember, you cannot block punches by simply placing your hands in front of your face. Blocking is the art of catching a flying object in mid-air. Block punches and kicks with your eyes, move your body accordingly, go with the flow of the flight, catch the attack at the right moment. That is why the Okinawans practice by using tropical fruit." This comes from the well known story that one of the training methods used in Okinawa is to have someone throw adanin, a tropical fruit, at you while you try to dodge, evade or catch the thrown fruit. Suddenly Yamakura recalled when and realized why he had been made to practice karate in the dark in the temple.

Yamakura's motto in karate became, "Train you stomach to be so strong that you can take punches and kicks without damage". This training must start with regular sit-ups and progress to Sanchin practice. Learn the laws of breathing and combine them with the flexing and relaxation of muscles. Do not make your stomach muscles rigid like steel, but make them firm like a rubber ball. Do not attempt to bounce the attacker's punches and kicks off your stomach. If you do, you will need to generate the same amount of force as the attack. Less force will be needed if you absorb the attack with the stomach muscles. Yamakura learned the secret of this stomach training and became famous for it.

In 1965, Yamakura participated in the annual Seigo Academy tournament. In the grand championship free style sparring match, Yamakura was matched with a senior instructor. Yamakura was the winner of the university division, and his senior was the winner of the general division which included all dojo students, military clubs, and also the graduates from the university clubs. This division obviously was considered to be much stronger than the university division.

During the opening moments of the match, the senior landed one of the fierce front snap kicks for which he was famous. This tremendous kick caught Yamakura full in the stomach, landing so powerfully that all in the arena could hear the loud sound of the impact. Everyone thought that Yamakura was hurt and worried about his ability to continue. This however, was not the case. Yamakura simply smiled confidently and continued the match. There had been no damage to either his body or fighting spirit. Even though the senior instructor had scored the first point with that tremendous kick, Yamakura went on to win the match.

Master Tada was walking down a hallway far from the fighting arena when he heard the thunderous noise of the senior's kick and asked a judge walking with him what had happened. The judge went back to the tournament arena and then returned, reporting to Master Tada that the senior's front kick had scored. Master Tada then asked who had received the mighty kick. When the judge reported that it was Yamakura, Master Tada continued walking to his office saying, "Then it will be no problem."

Yamakura entered all Western Goju Ryu Seigo Kan tournaments and he was the champion in both kata and kumite in 1965 and 1966. In 1967, only thirty days after his arrival in Boston, Yamakura entered his first American karate tournament. This tournament was the prestigious Henry Cho's All American held in Madison Square Garden, New York. Yamakura won the light weight championship. After one final good will tournament in Muskegon, Michigan, he retired from competition.

What is Traditional Karatedo?

by Mark Cramer

Traditional karatedo refers to two things. First, it refers to learning in the tradition of the founders of your style while keeping aware of the new developments in knowledge. Second, it refers to using karatedo as a mean of improving one's character and not using karate solely as a means of developing superb fighting skills which are capable of disabling an opponent.

To learn in the tradition of the founder of one's style, one must get as close to the source as possible. In the case of Goju Ryu, this means learning from someone who had a direct and deep relationship with Mr. Chojun Miyagi. However, this may exclude many individuals who were once believed to have fit this description. Researcher, Harry Cook, tells us that "It irritates some of the Goju men on Okinawa to hear Yamaguchi described as Chojun Miyagi's successor, since Miyagi was never in Japan for periods of longer than two or three months... In view of this, it may be doubted whether Yamaguchi ever learned the whole Goju system from Miyagi." [i] I maintain that it is impossible to learn the entirety of Goju Ryu in several months no matter how intense that training might be. Consequently, learning Goju Ryu in the manner that it was taught by Mr. Yoshimi (Gogen) Yamaguchi is likely not traditional Goju Ryu.

Since the death of Mr. Yamaguchi in 1989 (and even before hand), many of the top Goju Ryu instructors in Japan have taken great pains to learn from some of the direct students of Mr. Chojun Miyagi who had trained under his tutelage for extensive periods of time. These instructors realized that they needed to bring their Goju Ryu knowledge into the paradigm of the founder of their style. Thus, these instructors have made their karatedo consistent with the tradition of Mr. Miyagi.

In addressing the issue of character development, one must realize that this aspect of traditional karatedo has always been considered essential. In fact, Sokon Matsumura (1809-1902), one of the most prominent and influential pioneers of Okinawan karate, tells us that the study of karate is "incomplete until supplemented by *Jussha-no-gaku* (the study of the moral elements of the teachings of Confucius)." [ii] Consequently, long before karate came to be taught publicly, moral instruction or character development was considered an essential aspect of traditional karatedo.

Furthermore, Chojun Miyagi included character development in his karatedo curriculum. For instance, Morio Higaonna tells us that Mr. Chojun Miyagi's instruction during the era when karate was taught secretly to select individuals "stressed the importance of acquiring an understanding of society in general, over and above the martial arts topics. To this end he invited guest speakers to lecture... The invited guests would include top instructors in calligraphy, music, literature, poetry, as well as medical doctors." [iii] One would hardly invite musicians and poets to the dojo if one's only objective was to produce a fighter who could disable an opponent. Consequently we can see that Mr. Chojun Miyagi included character development in the Goju Ryu curriculum during this era of secrecy.

Mr. Eiichi Miyazato, a direct student of Mr. Chojun Miyagi, tells us that during the period prior to the introduction of karatedo to the public, a prospective student had to present a letter of introduction to the head of a dojo. The letter had to be from a well-respected person of good moral character, and the letter had to ensure the instructor that the prospective student was also an individual of good moral character. "Without such an introduction prospective students were turned away." [iv] Producing an individual who was capable of disabling an opponent was not their only objective. This is precisely why, teachers "expelled students with violent characters [and] refused students with such tendencies who wished to join his classes." [v]

Mr. Gichin Funakoshi tells us that another aspect of teaching during this period of secrecy. After a student was initially accepted for instruction, he would receive training only in the basics and would be required to perform chores around the dojo. During this time, the sensei would make observations on the character of the applicant and would evaluate whether that individual possessed the potential to become a worthy student. Only if the person was assessed as possessing a sufficiently sound character would he receive any in-depth instruction in karate. Consequently, only the most trusted students were given the opportunity to learn the secrets possessed by their teacher. Others were taught only basics or were intentionally taught incorrectly. [vi] Thus, only students who progressed along the path of developing their character were taught the deadly secrets of karatedo during this period of secrecy.

In the early 1900s karatedo began to be taught publicly, and this created two types of karate which were practiced in Okinawa – a secretive old-style of karate which was derived from the Chinese martial arts, and a new type of public karate which was stripped of many of its lethal techniques and which became much more Japanese in its appearance. [vii] However, few people understood that the karate which was introduced to the public was not the same form of karate that was once being taught in secrecy to a select few. Hiroshi Kinjo explains that this situation created a misunderstanding of what a karatedo teacher was actually teaching: "Except for a few experts who realized he was teaching the modern form, most thought that he was teaching the old style, and this misunderstanding still persists today. This is a serious misunderstanding." [viii]

Whereas a few of the karatedo masters continued to secretly teach the old-style of karate to a select few into the 1930s, distortions and alterations in this type of teaching were quite common. Some were intentional distortions created by teachers when they were teaching students who they believed were not worthy of the true meaning of the techniques. Other distortions of the original techniques were caused by students who misinterpreted what their teachers showed them. [ix]

Since all of these distortions and alterations were passed down as forms of the old-style karatedo and because public karatedo completely replaced the old-style eighty years ago, it is extremely doubtful that any genuine form of the older and deadlier type of karate still endures.

One must realize that it is impossible to turn back the hands of time and learn the old-style karate that was once taught in secret to a select few. This tradition came to an end by the 1930s, and a new tradition was born. To believe that the old-style karatedo can somehow be conjured up from the past is an illusion that leads one astray. Consequently, if you want to learn in the tradition of Chojun Miyagi, get as close to the source as possible and refine your character.

- [i] Noble, Graham Dragon Times: Vol. 8; page 28
- [ii] Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate, page 19
- [iii] Higaonna, Morio: The History of Karate: page 64
- [iv] Miyazato Eiichi: Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do: page 22
- [v] Miyazato Eiichi: Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do: pages 20 and 21
- [vi] Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate-Do Nyumon: page 23
- [vii] Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate: page 24
- [viii] Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate: page 23
- [ix] Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate-Do Nyumon: page 23



Thanks for the Memories 1980

First GKK karate program in California at the
Poway Community Center,
San Diego, California

Photo submitted by Mr. Jack Coleman

Did You Know?

by Rich Stamper

Did you know that if each of us brought in one new member it would double our membership? Pretty obvious. What is not obvious is why it doesn't happen. We certainly have something worth sharing.

Members Marketplace

Competition Mats and Storage/Transport Trailer
Interlocking karate competition mats and enclosed storage/transport trailer for sale.
Good condition. Two full size competition rings. \$3000.
Contact HQ.

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